

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

news release

For Release Sunday, March 8, 1970

Carroll 343-5634

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OBSERVES 50th ANNIVERSARY OF BIRD BANDING PARTICIPATION

The Federal Government's bird banding program began modestly in 1920, employing one professional and a secretary. Now 75 persons in the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife (BSFW) are working with computerized bird banding data, and there are records on 23 million birds.

March 1 was the 50th anniversary of Federal participation. On that date in 1920 an office to handle banding activities was staffed in the old Bureau of Biological Survey, BSFW's predecessor.

Until that time banding was managed by the American Bird Banding Association, sponsored by the Linnaean Society of New York. The Association's secretary, Howard H. Cleaves, issued all bands and kept all records.

Growth of banding activities made small staffs inadequate to handle incoming data. Eventually, man himself became inadequate; two years ago much of the operation had to be computerized.

Last fall a centralized bird banding laboratory was dedicated at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md., a far cry from the single room in downtown Washington which the program occupied in 1920.

BSFW oversees the banding by amateurs and professionals of about 1½ million birds annually at the present time. In recent years, an average of about 100,000 identification bands have been returned by interested sportsmen and by "birdwatchers."

Data from recovered bands help Bureau biologists learn about migration patterns. Results of banding disclosed the four North American flyways which have become a useful administrative tool in waterfowl management.

In addition to providing information needed in setting the best possible waterfowl seasons, banding activities yield data on the abundance, movement, and kill of other game birds. These activities also provide information on numbers and flights of birds causing damage to crops in some parts of the country, and also give an indication of the effects of pesticides on migratory birds.

"We've come a long way since the Federal Government's first bird study in 1885 to determine the effects of English sparrows on farming," said Bureau Director John S. Gottschalk.